

Have you flown recently and been frustrated by flight delays, cancellations or simply a lack of information? Maybe a better question is when have you flown and not been frustrated?

You are not alone. The first half of 2007 has been the worst in history for airline delays: through July more than one-quarter of flights were delayed, and over six percent of flights arrived more than one hour behind schedule. These record delays left millions of air travelers frustrated, angry, tired, late, and stranded, and highlighted the need for improvements in airports and the air traffic control system.

And, according to forecasts, the worst is yet to come. By 2025, airline traffic is expected to explode, with a tripling of passengers, operations, and cargo. With the rapidly growing demand for air travel, the need for airport infrastructure development will only increase.

Thousands of fliers fed up with long waits on the airport tarmac held a “strand-in” on the National Mall on Wednesday to demonstrate the growing public dissatisfaction with current air travel conditions. Lawmakers on Capitol Hill heard their concerns – many of them which we share – and have been working with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), consumer groups, and the airline industry to develop policies to reduce

delays and streamline services.

Indeed, a robust investment in aviation infrastructure is crucial to increase air capacity and decrease flight delays. Constructing new runways and runway extensions is the most effective way to increase the ease of passengers, cargo and planes in getting through airports and getting to their final destination.

Last week, the U.S. House took action to provide relief to frustrated flyers in passing the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2007, a bill which provides for a long overdue update of the nation's air transportation system. Designed with the goal of reducing delays and improving safety today and tomorrow, the legislation modernizes the system to enable it to handle the expected significant growth in future air travel demand over the next twenty years.

The bill also takes a first step on consumer protections with a federal Passenger Bill of Rights, requiring airlines and airports to develop emergency contingency plans to take care of passengers involved in long flight delays, including plans for deplaning so travelers are no longer held hostage on the

tarmac.

To reduce over-booking, the FAA must now meet with airports to ensure reductions in the numbers of flights in situations where the practice is causing chronic delays. And when cancellations or diverted flights do occur, the Department of Transportation (DOT) will be required to collect and publish monthly data to post on the DOT website.

Aside from reducing delays and introducing new airport efficiencies, the increased investment authorized in this bill will also lead to improved safety in the air and on the runway. In addition to upgrades in infrastructure and systems, the legislation increases the number of aviation safety inspectors by more than one-third, and strengthens efforts to reduce runway incursions.

While these measures won't completely eliminate delays, the hope is that they will substantially reduce them. And for those customers who may still encounter a frustrating flight experience every now and again, a DOT complaint hotline will be established and well-publicized for easy reference.

With an eye on the environment, the modernization bill also contains provisions to reduce global warming, including the development of cleaner, quieter, more efficient engines and aircraft, a pilot program to reduce idling times for planes, and a pilot program to apply promising environmental research at airports.

The nation's air transportation system is critical to our economic well-being, our international competitiveness, and our quality of life. I believe that the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2007 will help maintain its continued vitality and safety. To my bewilderment, the Bush Administration issued a veto threat the day before the legislation was passed. As a lawmaker who believes in sound public policy and as a regular flight passenger who hopes to someday fly a friendlier sky, I hope he reconsiders.